(d) to (f) As regards minerals and ores, there has been an increase in exports during 1999-2000 except for marginal decrease during 1998-99. The main reason for fall in export during 1998-99 was lower intake by Japan, South Korea and China—India's major buyers, due to recession in the World steel industry.

Siege of Tobacco Board Office

5206. SHRI K. KALAVENKATA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether over 2000 tobacco growers in Andhra Pradesh laid siege to the Tobacco Board office in March, 2000;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the action taken to ensure that tobacco exporters as well as cigarette manufacturers do not exploit the conditions and blackmail the farmers?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) Several hundred tobacco growers of Andhra Pradesh assembled at the Tobacco Board office on 16th March, 2000.

(b) To present their demands. Action taken to protect the farmers include:

(i) Meetings held with manufacturers, exporters and traders to purchase tobacco at platforms as per requirements indicated while fixing crop size.

(ii) Meetings held with farmers to solve the situation of over supply.

(iii) Inducting Government agency to enter the market to ensure remunerative prices to the farmers.

(iv) Fresh registration of growers not be undertaken for the time being.

Merger of DIPP with DID

5207. SHRI K. RAHMAN KHAN: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal to merge the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP) and the Department of Industrial Development (DID) in view of the proposal of downsizing of Government; and

(b) if so, what are the details in this regard and by when a decision is likely to be taken in the matter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN): (a) and (b) The Department of Industrial Development (DID) has been merged with Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP).

FDI in Tea Plantations

5208. SHRI P. PRABHAKAR REDDY: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering a proposal for simplifying conditions for foreign companies to invest in tea plantations and raising the limit of FDI to 74 per cent;

(b) if so, the details thereof and reasons therefor; and

(c) what is the expected impact of this move on the fate of domestic tea industry which is facing competition and challenges all round?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. A proposal to allow 74% Foreign Direct Investment in tea industry is under consideration of the Government.

(c) The Foreign Direct Investment may provide the tea industry with the much required capital for replanting, new planting etc. and technology for upgrading and modernising the production and packaging processes etc.

Protecting the Interests of Tobacco Farmers

5209. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have protected tobacco farmers' interests regarding the proposed restrictions against tobacco;

(b) whether Government have sent their representative to various Expert Committee meetings on the subject;

(c) whether it is a fact that Government and the Tobacco Board have been less than alert on this matter;

(d) what steps are proposed to ensure that tobacco farmers are not harmed by hasty legislation;